

Conducting a Storm Drain Tagging project

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • SC DHEC's Water Watch
2600 Bull Street • Columbia, SC 29201 • (803) 898-4211 • www.scdhec.net/wwatch

BACKGROUND:

Question: Why should people be concerned about what enters a storm drain?

Answer: Because anything flushed down a storm drain is not treated before it enters a waterbody. This means that motor oil, antifreeze, grass clippings, pet wastes, or any other waste on streets and sidewalks goes directly into a nearby waterbody, and not a wastewater treatment plant.

DESCRIPTION:

Educate your community about runoff pollution, also known as nonpoint source water pollution. An effective way to spread the message is by tagging the curb next to a storm drain with the message, "Dump No Waste – Drains to Stream" (or River, or Lake). Drains may be tagged by stenciling or using curb markers. Distributing informative flyers to nearby residents and telling the local media about your project will also help spread the word about runoff pollution.

OBJECTIVE:

By participating in this activity your group will:

- Learn about the sources of runoff pollution.
- Understand why runoff pollution is a threat to the environment.
- Encourage others to be more aware of the *storm drain-to-waterbody* connection.

TIME:

The time will vary depending on how many drains you plan on tagging, how many volunteers you have, and how far apart the storm drains are spaced. It takes about 5 to 10 minutes to tag each storm drain.



MATERIALS:

STENCILING	
✓	stencils
✓	traffic marking spray paint
CURB MARKING	
✓	drain markers
✓	heavy duty adhesive
✓	wire brush
✓	broom and dust pan
✓	orange safety vests, orange cones, and/or orange flags
✓	map or directions showing locations of storm drains to be stenciled
✓	letter of permission to stencil from agency/property owner
✓	permission slips for participants
✓	garbage bags for wet stencils
✓	garbage bags for trash such as debris cleaned from around the storm drain
✓	cardboard – to use for paint shield and stencil transport
✓	paper towels or rags
✓	heavy duty tape and scissors (optional)

A limited number of stencils are available from the Water Watch Coordinator at the SC DHEC Central Office in Columbia. Please call (803) 898-4211. The coordinator also has information on ordering curb markers and stencils.

The other supplies you will need may be purchased or donated by local businesses, community residents, civic organizations, or the volunteers themselves. Keep in mind that each team will need its own set of supplies.

BEFORE YOU TAG:

- 1 **Obtain Permission:** Get permission to tag storm drains from the government department that maintains the storm drains. This is often the Department of Public Works in your city or county. Be sure to ask for a permission letter to provide you with proof if you are questioned by a road crew or police officer. Begin this process at least one month before you plan to stencil.

To tag on *private property*, contact the landowner or manager, whether the property is a home, business, or apartment complex. If you are interested in stenciling storm drains on federal property, be sure to obtain permission from the appropriate federal authority.

- 2 **Keep Weather in Mind:** Weather conditions are important for the success of this project. Paint sticks best when the pavement is dry and warm (above 50°F). Windy days are not good because the spray paint can drift onto nearby automobiles and debris can be blown onto the freshly painted surface. It may be a good idea to choose a rain date.
- 3 **Divide Up the Area and Recruit Volunteers:** Using a neighborhood map, carefully consider the area your group will tag. (Remember, busy roads are not safe.) You will need 2 to 4 volunteers per tagging group. Prepare participant permission slips if necessary.
- 4 **Notify the Neighborhood:** A day or two before you plan to tag, distribute flyers explaining the storm drain program and requesting that people avoid parking their cars within 20 feet of the storm drains you plan to tag. If you cannot distribute the information ahead of time, have one member of the team distribute the flyers while others paint. An example flyer and day-of-event door hanger are available at the Water Watch website. Your group can also choose to create a flyer that is more specific to your particular area.



HOW TO STENCIL:

- 1 **Prepare for Success:** Review and follow the Safety Rules. Wear old clothes, and consider using safety goggles and work gloves. Do not paint if a car is parked within 20 feet of the drain.
- 2 **Scrub Around the Drain:** Scrub the street area surrounding the storm drain with the wire brush, and use a broom to sweep the dirt into the dustpan. Use garbage bags to dispose of the debris. Do not sweep dirt and debris into the storm drain.



- 3 **Put the Stencil in Place:** Position the stencil in the gutter or other area that is next to the storm drain inlet where the message will be most visible. Tape or hold the stencil in place.
- 4 **Paint Away:** Spray paint the message taking care that paint does not get into the storm drain. Apply paint in a sweeping motion. Two light coats will give you better results than one heavy coat. Allow the first coat of paint to dry before applying the second coat of paint. A cardboard shield may be used to prevent over spray.
- 5 **Check for Missed Drains:** When you are done with the project, have one team member check that all storm drains in your area have been stenciled. It's easy to miss one!
- 6 **Clean Up:** Place wet stencils in a plastic bag or between two pieces of cardboard to prevent paint from getting on people or other surfaces. Out of direct sunlight, lay stencils flat to dry. Do not place them on materials that could stick to the stencil. Once dry, the paint should then flake or peel off. Removing paint from the stencil will help it to last longer.

HOW TO USE CURB MARKERS:

- ① **Prepare for Success:** Review and follow the Safety Rules. Wear old clothes, and consider using safety goggles and work gloves.
- ② **Clean the Surface:** Make sure application surface is flat, dry and free of any loose debris.
- ③ **Apply the Adhesive:** Start with a bead of adhesive about 1/8 of an inch from the outside edge of the curb marker. Then work toward the center of the marker.
- ④ **Stick It!** Apply the marker to the application surface pushing down hard, forcing adhesive out around the entire edge. It is important that the entire edge of the marker is sealed to the application surface.

AFTER YOU'VE TAGGED THE STORM DRAINS:

Pat yourself on the back! You are helping to keep South Carolina's waters clean and alive!

Return stencils to the Water Watch Coordinator if requested.

Report on what you have accomplished. Complete the Storm Drain Tagging Tracking Sheet included in this packet.



Storm Drain Tagging Tracking Sheet

Please inform the Water Watch Coordinator about your tagging activities. Submit the information below by mail, fax or e-mail. You may also submit any project materials you would like to include. Please send to: Water Watch Program, SCDHEC, 2600 Bull Street, Columbia, SC 29201, fax number (803) 898-4140. If you prefer e-mail, access the coordinator's e-mail address via the Water Watch website, www.scdhec.net/wwatch.

Person Reporting _____ Organization _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail _____

Address _____

Date Tagging Took Place _____ Method of Tagging _____

Number of Youths Participating _____ Number of Adults Participating _____

Local Partner or Contributing Organizations _____

Total Number of Drains Tagged _____

Location(s) of Drains Tagged _____

In your opinion has the Storm Drain Tagging Activity created awareness for water resource protection in your local community?

Additional Comments _____

SAFETY *rules*

- Wear a highly visible orange safety vest. Use orange traffic cones and/or orange flags to alert traffic to your presence.
- Stay on the sidewalk and have one team member assigned to monitor traffic for the group. It is very important to be aware of traffic, bikers, and pedestrians while tagging.
- Children should always be accompanied by adults.
- Always work as a team. Never work alone.
- Walk facing the traffic to and from tagging areas.

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Tell all about it!

The benefits of a storm drain stenciling project should go beyond your own group's education. This activity is great for spreading the storm drain-to-waterbody message. Some options for getting the word out are: create a personalized flyer or door hanger; issue a press release; encourage local media to cover your event; or take pictures and write an article for a local newsletter, community publication or submit them to the local paper.

If you would like suggestions for preparing a press release, please contact the Water Watch Coordinator.